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ABSTRACT

Although the literature of library administration draws extensively on that of business management, it is difficult to compare library supervision to business or industrial supervision. Library supervisors often do not have managerial training and may consider their management role as secondary. The educational level of the staff they supervise may be higher than those in business, and the financial structure of the library prevents the use of standard industrial personnel practices such as bonuses. The supervisor must have knowledge of the tasks to be performed by the person to be supervised and of the fundamental concepts of management, including organization theory, leadership theory, and the techniques of motivation. Although not all professionals who work for libraries supervise, the schools of library and information science should consider including supervisory training in their programs. Supervision is an aspect of professional work which requires more consideration than it has had to date; the human relations aspects of library work are in need of attention. (Author/SL)

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SUPERVISION IN LIBRARIES

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Abstract

This paper examines the positions of the manager, the middle manager and the supervisor in libraries. It surveys the role of the professional librarian who is also a supervisor. The material is gathered from the business management literature, the library management literature, and the pilot Management Review and Analysis Program* which was conducted at Purdue University in 1972-73.

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*The Management Review and Analysis Program (MRAP) was developed by the Office of University Library Management Studies of the Association for Research Libraries. The Program is described in a paper by Duane E. Webster. (1)

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Introduction

Although the literature of library administration draws extensively on that of business management, it is difficult to compare library supervision to business or industrial supervision. One aspect is that top library managers or administrators sometimes do not have the training or experience in management concepts that their counterparts in industry or business may have. The library administrator may consider himself first a scholar, or a subject specialist, or a cataloger. The industrial manager also is a specialist—an engineer, an accountant, or a lawyer. However, he considers himself a manager first.

The middle managers and supervisors in libraries are even more difficult to compare to their business counterparts. They may lack the experience of working under trained managers. They may consider themselves specialists first and managers second. Their span of control, or number of people they supervise, ranges widely. The educational level of the people they supervise may be higher than those in business and industry.

The professional librarians without administrative or supervisory responsibilities are different from professional employees in other organizations because often they encounter barriers in acquiring the managerial training and experience they need if they want to advance in the library organization.

The clerical employees of libraries sometime vary greatly from those in other areas. Although a similar problem exists in many geographic areas, academic libraries, especially those located in college towns, tend to employ people who have a higher level of education than the jobs require.

Due to financial structure of libraries, administrators are unable to regard employees through the standard methods used in business and industry. Some of these incentives are bonuses, prizes, raises, profit

sharing programs, stock option plans, or discounts.

Defining Supervision

People may think of a supervisor as a foreman in a factory who oversees a production line of 100 people all making widgets. In determining the proper role of a supervisor in libraries, part of the problem is defining the terms "manager", "middle manager", and "supervisor."

The "manager" (2) is the chairman, the director, the president, the vice president, the head of a large department, or the overseer of a number of middle managers. The equivalent titles in a library may be Library Director, Head of Technical Processing, Vice President of Information Services, or Assistant Director.

Some papers on library management define a "middle manager" as a professional who supervises other professionals (3) while a supervisor handles non-professionals. Other writers define middle management as all levels of management from supervisory management up through vice-president. Equivalent titles may be Head of Cataloging, Science Librarian, or Branch Librarian.

The term "supervisor" designates the first level of management, having the formally assigned authority and responsibility for planning and controlling the activities of subordinate, nonsupervisory employees, usually on a direct, face-to-face basis. Supervisors are in charge of one generally cohesive or specialized function while middle managers are charged with directing and coordinating dissimilar functions. The supervisor makes specific decisions after the managers have made the overall policies. Some equivalent titles may be Circulation Librarian, Cataloger of Non Print Media, or Serials Librarian.

The Supervisor in Libraries

Many librarians first enter the field by working in libraries as sub-professionals, clericals, or student employees. They may base their attitudes toward the supervisory aspects of their jobs more on their work experience than on the true nature of supervision or management.

In the Management Review and Analysis Program at Purdue University, many professional librarians indicated that they did not consider supervision as a professional task. They regarded it as a necessary evil which was part of their jobs but detracted from their true professional effort.

For the past 15 or 20 years, librarians have been arguing whether or not they are professionals. One area of dispute has been the question of what constitutes a professional task and what is a nonprofessional task. (4, 5) Librarians themselves are confused whether or not supervision is a professional task.

However, both the American Library Association and the Library Association include supervision in their lists of professional responsibilities. The list which was issued by the Library Association included, as Item 27,

> Supervising the work programme. Laying out and assigning work and seeing that workers are effectively employed is performed at various levels... (6)

In the American Library Association (7) list are such tasks as

> Establishing and supervising check list of serials
> Establishing and supervising exchanges
> Establishing and supervising accession records
> Supervising fiction cataloging
> Supervising upkeep process
> Supervising shelving procedure

Downs (8) and Delzell describe the duties at the various professional levels:

Librarian I....performance of circulation and order routines involving supervision of clerical workers....
Librarian II....performance of circulation or order routines of a supervisory or administrative nature with responsibility for a small group of professional or sub-professional employees....
Librarian III....supervisor of a divisional library of medium scope and complexity....
Librarian IV....supervisor and coordinator of difficult cataloging or classification;...supervisor of a divisional library of large scope and complexity...; head of a small department who supervises work of a moderately difficult nature performed by professional and clerical personnel....
Librarian V....supervise the activities of a department, usually through subordinate supervisors....

Kortendick and Stone (9) on page 103 of their book, list similar responsibilities in their study of the amount of time federal librarians spend on various activities:

Directly supervise and guide subordinates
Assign jobs to subordinates
Check the accuracy of work of subordinates
Train new employees in the performance of their work
Schedule activities to insure that deadlines are met
Have over-all responsibility for the cataloging program
Make decisions based on consultation with subordinates
Assign priorities for the completion of work
Stimulate subordinates toward superior performance and creativity
Give orders to initiate, modify, or stop activities
Review decisions and/or proposals that are made by subordinates

Chapter 2 of Dale Shaffer's book The Maturity of Librarianship as a Profession (10)also mentions supervisory activities.

The first job of a new professional may range from full supervision to non supervision. The young professional in a large library system often is assigned routine tasks. The senior clerks may have more authority than the new professional in the library hierarchy. In a special and/or small library the person may have full responsibility and just plunge ahead into running the operation.

The Family (11)

As in many organizations, libraries tend to develop the "one big happy family" syndrome. Any suggestion or minor criticism is taken as an affront by the manager or middle manager as an indication of a flaw in the "family" structure. The department head may not delegate authority to the professionals so they are unable to gain supervisory experience. Everyone in the group is expected to "love" their work and their fellow employees.

Several authorities feel that a happy employee is not necessarily an effective employee. Sometimes the employee who gripes or suggests a different procedure is an efficient person who can show us better ways to organize our work. However, rightly or wrongly, in both business and academia, a standard method for evaluating a supervisor's performance is the job satisfaction of the employees in the group, often reflected in the turnover rate.

Another aspect is that not all employees have the same view of their jobs. Whether professional or non-professional, they may take a job in a library as a step to another job, for training in a specific aspect of the work, for experience, or because they need an income.

Clerical Employees

In academic libraries the clerical employees may be student spouses, faculty spouses, former students, or local residents. Their educational backgrounds may range from high school diploma through Ph.D. The positions that are available in libraries cannot challenge this range of skills equally. Since so many people with baccalaureate degrees are available, (12) administrators tend to specify a college degree as necessary for a job.

They overlook many qualified people without degrees who have interest, motivation, skills, etc. A degree does not assure that an individual will perform well on any job. In fact, a task that does not challenge a person's skills or interests is a prime source for low job satisfaction. Educational background and experience do not determine the motivation to perform an activity.

At Purdue University the average length of employment for clericals is 1 1/2 to 2 years. Their current job may have little relation to their chosen career or life goals. Often they can expect only a "cost of living" increase in their salaries each year. They may not receive a financial reward for good job performance. They are seldom employed long enough to receive a promotion.

Library administrators tend to compound their employee problems by taking people who may be educationally over-qualified for the position, paying them minimum amounts of money, assigning them fairly routine tasks, asking them to work one night per week and every third weekend, sometimes giving them very inadequate equipment with which to work, and expecting them to be happy.

What is Supervision?

Summarized from the business management literature, the supervisor must have knowledge in the following areas:

1. Technical knowledge or how to perform the tasks the person is supervising
2. Knowledge of fundamental concepts of management, such as human behavior theory, organization theory, and leadership theory

3. Knowledge of the basic supervisory functions of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling in day to day problem situations
4. Capability for objective self-appraisal and self-development of leadership characteristics

Let us examine these points in detail. For convenience, we will use the pronouns "he" and "him" for both male and female supervisors.

Technical knowledge

Since the supervisor is the person in management who is closest to his specialized area, he is expected to know as much or more about the technical details than the employees. He does not necessarily have to be more skilled than any of his subordinates, but he should know enough about the work to teach them effectively and aid them in solving their problems.

Fundamental concepts of management

This requires at least an elementary knowledge of human behavior, of the drives, interests, wants, and needs of people as individuals and as members of groups. Knowledge of organization theory involves consideration of all the environmental forces and effects that surround the supervisor. Two factors in the organization that may predetermine the behavior of individuals are 1) the formal organization chart and its chain of command and 2) the nature of the informal organization that exists within the formal organization.

The study of leadership involves four basic styles:

1) authoritarian, in which the manager tells people what to do
2) communicative, in which he tells them what to do and then tells them why he told them
3) consultative, in which he obtains subordinates' ideas before

he decides open-mindedly considering them before a final decision is made

4) participative, in which the supervisor is a member of the group, and the group makes the decision.

Basic supervisory functions

These tasks include planning and decision making, organizing the work unit, establishing control procedures, and maintaining a proper work environment. There are also duties of selecting and developing employees, counseling, evaluating, and disciplining.

Objective self-appraisal

The supervisor tends to see himself as a more effective leader than his subordinates think he is. His supervisors tend to agree with the subordinates' view of his performance. Objective self-appraisal involves the realization that the subordinates and superiors agree fairly well on the supervisor's job performance, but neither agree with the supervisor's view of his own performance.

Motivation

Unfortunately many people think only of the negative aspects of supervision, such as reprimanding, firing, or mediating. The bulk of the work involves positive acts, such as planning, training, encouraging, conferring, or discussing.

Supervision can be a creative activity of motivating people to work together and to set goals for the unit, each person determining what his talents are to achieve the goals of the group.

The area of motivating employees is one which seems to be a headache for library management people. Administrators hold before their staffs

very theoretical missions or goals, such as, information service to an entire community. They have little means to supply financial incentives to do good work.

Library managers may establish numerical goals of cataloging so many books per day, reducing customer queues to 60 seconds at the circulation desks, or answering all questions within 10 minutes at the reference desk. Are these valid measures of a professional librarian's supervisory abilities? Are these goals toward which supervisors can motivate their personnel to work? Are these reliable measures of a library's performance? There is very little feedback on how the library product--information--is used.

In Appendix I there is an outline of classic theories of motivation gathered from the literature of business management.

Acquire Supervisory Skills

Although not all professionals who work for libraries supervise, the schools of library and information science should consider including supervisory training in their programs. Fussler says (13)

> ...Although many libraries and library systems have become large and complex enterprises, the formal programs for the professional education of librarians, have, in general, given a relatively small percentage of the available time to content designed to achieve a high level of management proficiency....

Goode (14) states that librarians assume administrative tasks much earlier in their careers than do other professionals. Some schools offer courses on administration, interpersonal communication, etc. which supply background information. A person planning to supervise may take personnel or supervision courses as electives in graduate school or enroll in supplemental courses after graduation. There are some excellent studies on administration such as the ones by Zackert (15) or Lowell (16).

Some library administrators (17) attempt to provide all employees who supervise with training in the form of in-house seminars, guest speakers, opportunities to take formal course work, attendance at workshops, etc. But supervision is an aspect of professional work which requires a great deal more consideration than it has had to date; the human relations aspects of our work are sadly in need of attention.

In conclusion, supervision is an area of the professional librarian's career that cannot be ignored. It is a creative activity of motivating people to work together to implement the libraries' missions and objectives.

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15. Zackert, Martha Jane K. and Veronica S. Pantelidis. "Experimental Methods of Teaching Special Librarianship" Special Libraries 63:545-584 (December 1972)

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Appendix I.

1. Maslow, A. Motivation and Personality. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1954.

   Maslow's theory is that everyone has five sets of basic needs, which constitute a hierarchy in terms of motivation. This heirarchy starts with, at the bottom, 1) physiological or physical needs, 2) safety or security needs, 3) affectional or belonging needs, 4) ego or self-esteem needs, and finally on top 5) self-fulfullment needs. Maslow further postulated that 1) the satisfaction of needs at any one level in this heirarchy will motivate a subordinate's behavior only if needs at all previous levels have been optimally satisfied, and 2) satisfied needs are not motivators.

2. Herzberg, Frederick. Work and the Nature of Man. Cleveland, World Publishing Company, 1966.

3. Herzberg, Frederick et al. The Motivation to Work. New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1959.

   Herzberg theorizes that there are two separate processes of motivation. One, the "motivation" factors, sometimes called challenge factors, involves high-level needs, often called self-fulfillment or self-actualization needs, which he believes to be the key to superior work performance. The second process is composed of "hygiene" factors, which serve primarily to prevent job dissatisfaction while having little effect on positive job attitudes.

4. Argyris, Chris. Executive Leadership. New York, Harper and Brothers, 1953.

   Argyris analyzes the nature of the relationship between the demands of formal organization and the needs of individuals. He considers their mutual impact in three areas: interdependence of individuals and organizations, needs of a mature individual, and demands of formal organizations.

5. McGregor, Douglas. The Human Side of Enterprise. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960.

   McGregor developed the classic Theory X and Theory Y concept of motivation. Theory X is based on the premise that workers inherently do not like to work, Theory Y that people do like and want to work under proper conditions.

6. Blake, R. E. and Mouton, Jane S. The Managerial Grid. Houston, Gulf Publishing Company, 1964.

Blake developed the "grid theory", or the Managerial Grid. The grid is composed of two variables, one (on the horizontal axis), reflects a concern for production or output, the other (the vertical axis) reflects a concern for people. Five leadership styles are plotted on this grid: "impoverished" manager (or Bureaucratic), the "country club" manager (high concern for people but low concern for the task), the "task master" who has a high concern for the task but low concern for people, the "ideal" or team manager who has a high concern for both tasks and people, and "dampened pendulum" (or middle of the road) manager.

7. Likert, Rensis. New Patterns of Management. New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960.

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Likert utilized the scientific research approach to developing fundamental principles applicable to the managing of people. His major criteria for evaluating administrative effectiveness are: 1) productivity or some similar measure of the organization's success in achieving its productivity goals and 2) the job satisfaction and other satisfaction gained by employees or members of the group.

VITA

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